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Directorate of Intelligence
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Office of African and Latin American Analysis

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Organization of African Unity: At a Crossroads

Summary

31 MAY 1994

South Africa's passage to black majority rule and Rwanda's descent into tribal bloodshed symbolize the crossroads that the Organization of African Unity (OAU) faces in confronting a changed array of problems.

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- The OAU was founded in 1963 by newly independent states concerned with eradicating the remaining colonial presence in Africa, eliminating white minority rule, and protecting their sovereignty and territorial integrity against presumed external threats.¹
- This year's OAU summit in Tunisia beginning on 13 June marks the end of this 30-year preoccupation with African liberation and highlights the OAU's new challenge to deal more effectively with key issues internal to Africa--particularly ethnic conflict.

To make the organization more effective, OAU leaders will have to work around a number of constraints.

- *Its outdated charter leans against OAU involvement in member states' internal affairs, does not mention democracy, and makes little reference to human rights.*
- *Moreover, the Rwandan crisis underscores the OAU's lack of capability--or intention--to organize and mount an African peacekeeping operation on its own.*

The OAU has taken modest steps in the past three years to develop a greater capacity for addressing some of the continent's pressing difficulties, particularly in the area of conflict resolution. *The potential for greater South African involvement over time may enhance the OAU's structural reform efforts, but for the foreseeable future the organization probably will continue to be overshadowed by the UN and regionally important African states.*

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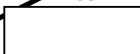
¹ The Western Sahara, once ruled by Spain, is the only former colonial territory whose status has not been resolved. No date has been set for a planned UN-supervised referendum on whether the territory should become independent or be absorbed by Morocco.

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Rwanda. The OAU continues to look to Tanzania, the UN, and Western donors to take the lead in Rwanda, while it tries to play a supportive political and coordinating role. Rwanda's warring factions, according to [redacted] reporting, have little regard for the OAU, which ended its small military observer mission last October after a 13-month effort. The hesitancy of many African countries to volunteer troops for the UN's proposed new peacekeeping operation, in our judgment, reflects a wariness of getting bogged down in a Somalia-like situation under an unclear UN mandate and a preference for a major power to assume leadership in any peacekeeping force. [redacted]

The Rwandan crisis underscores the OAU's lack of capacity--or intention--to organize and mount an African peacekeeping operation on its own. At best, the OAU can try to line up potential troop contributors among member states, whose outfitting and deployment depends on international assistance. The OAU's earlier experience in rounding up East African forces to participate in expanded regional peacekeeping in Liberia highlights the need for potential African troop-contributing countries to take steps to shorten the long leadtime needed to ready troops before their transport and deployment. Senegal and Ghana stand as examples; each has military units prepared and designated exclusively for peacekeeping. [redacted]

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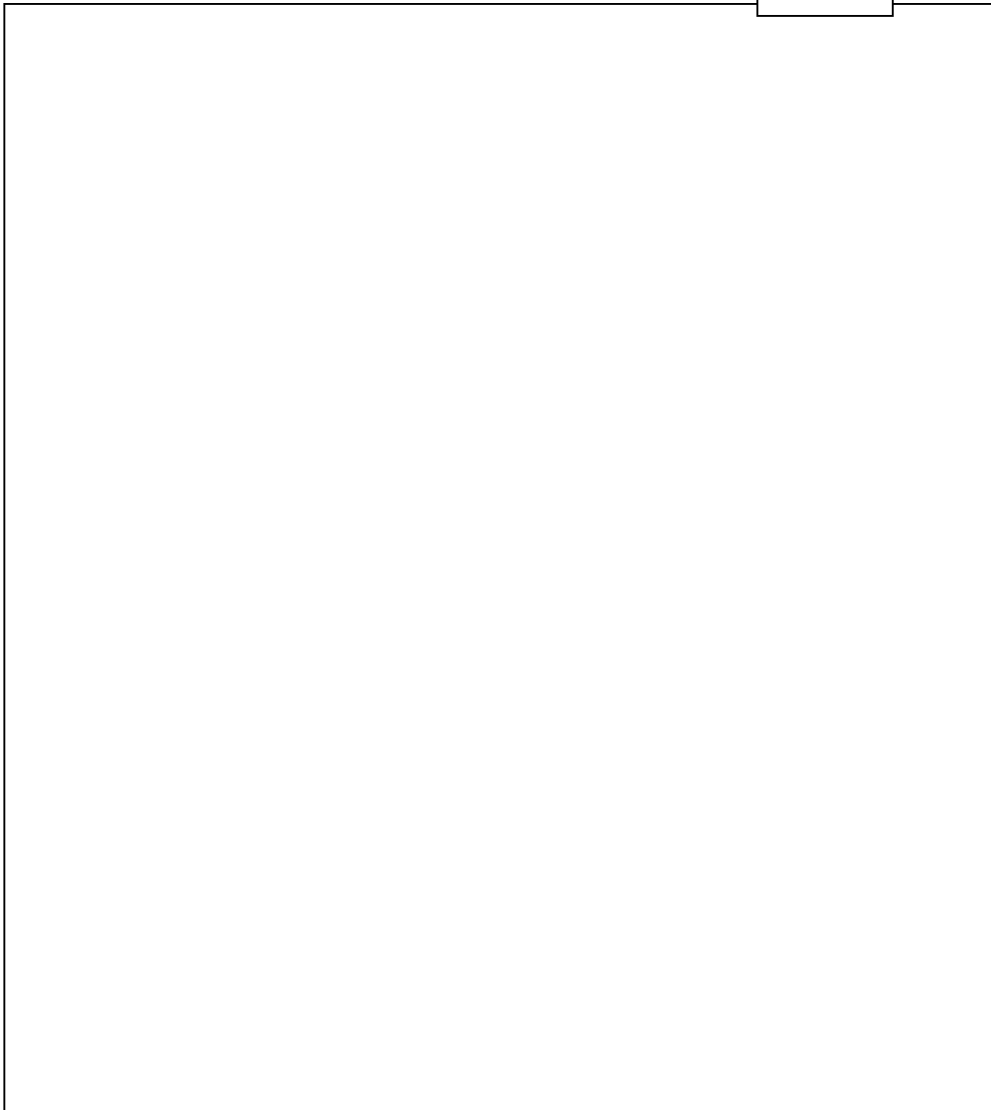
OAU Military Observer Missions

In support of its more active stance on conflict resolution, the OAU has mounted two military observer missions, first in Rwanda and now in Burundi. These missions represent a learning experience as the OAU seeks to develop a modest conflict-resolution capability.

- The OAU maintained a 50-man, Nigerian-commanded Neutral Military Observer Group (NMOG) in Rwanda between September 1992 and October 1993. Its assignment was to monitor the cease-fire that government and rebels agreed to before the August 1993 Arusha accord that called for a transitional power-sharing government, military integration, and democratic elections. Politically, the OAU's presence provided the Rwandan protagonists a measure of confidence needed to proceed with negotiations. Operationally, the OAU's performance on the ground was weak.

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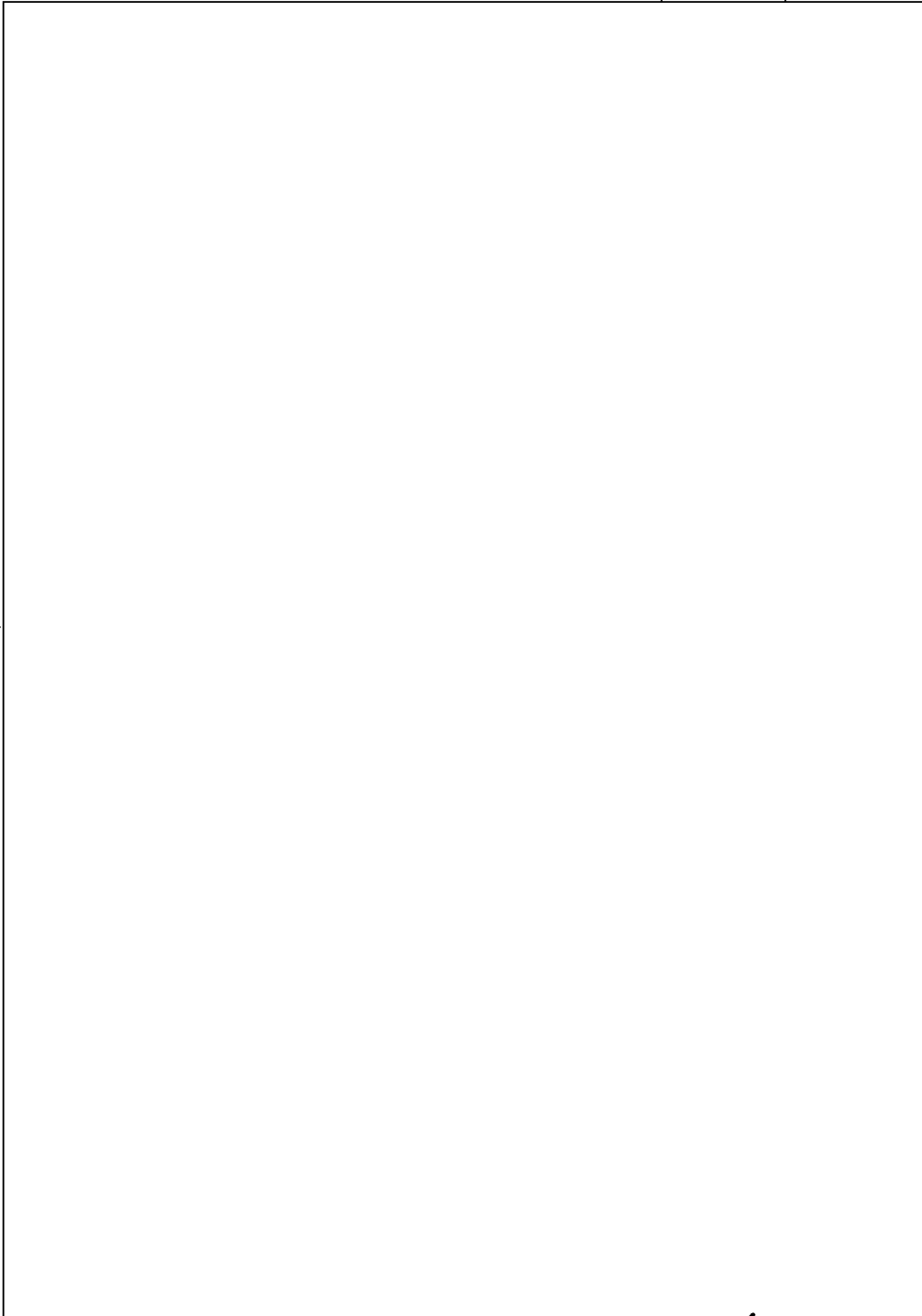
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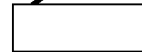
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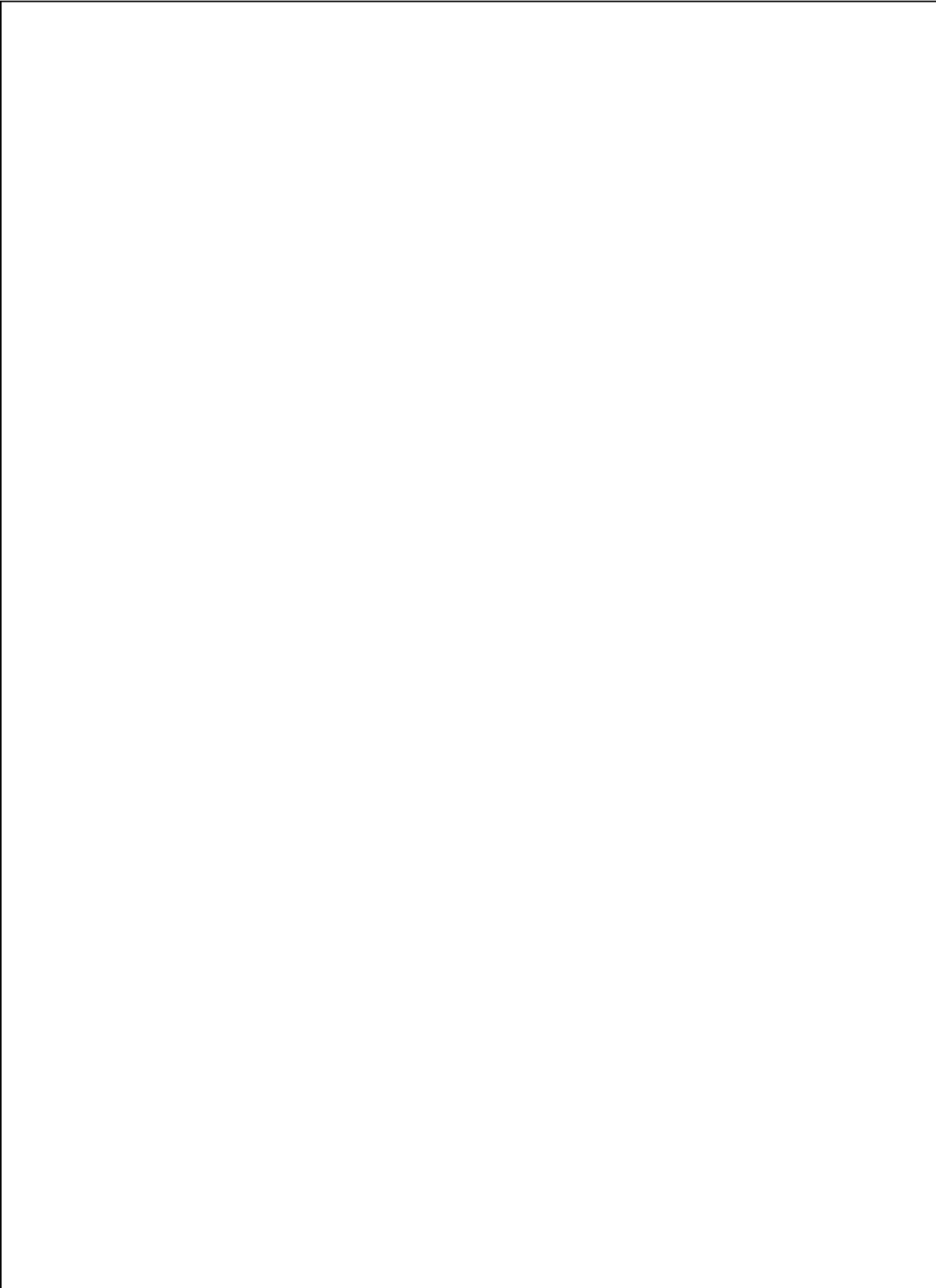
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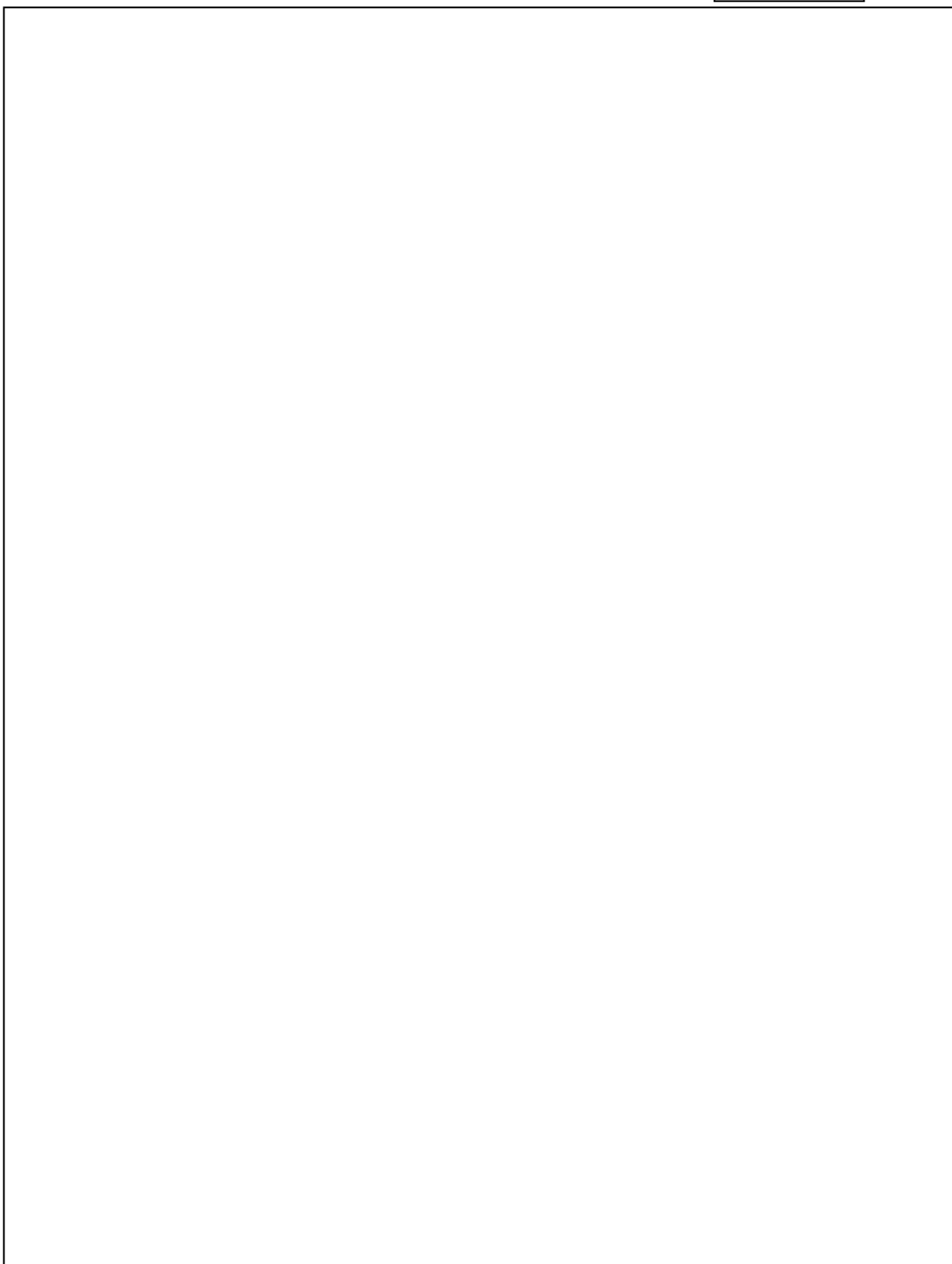
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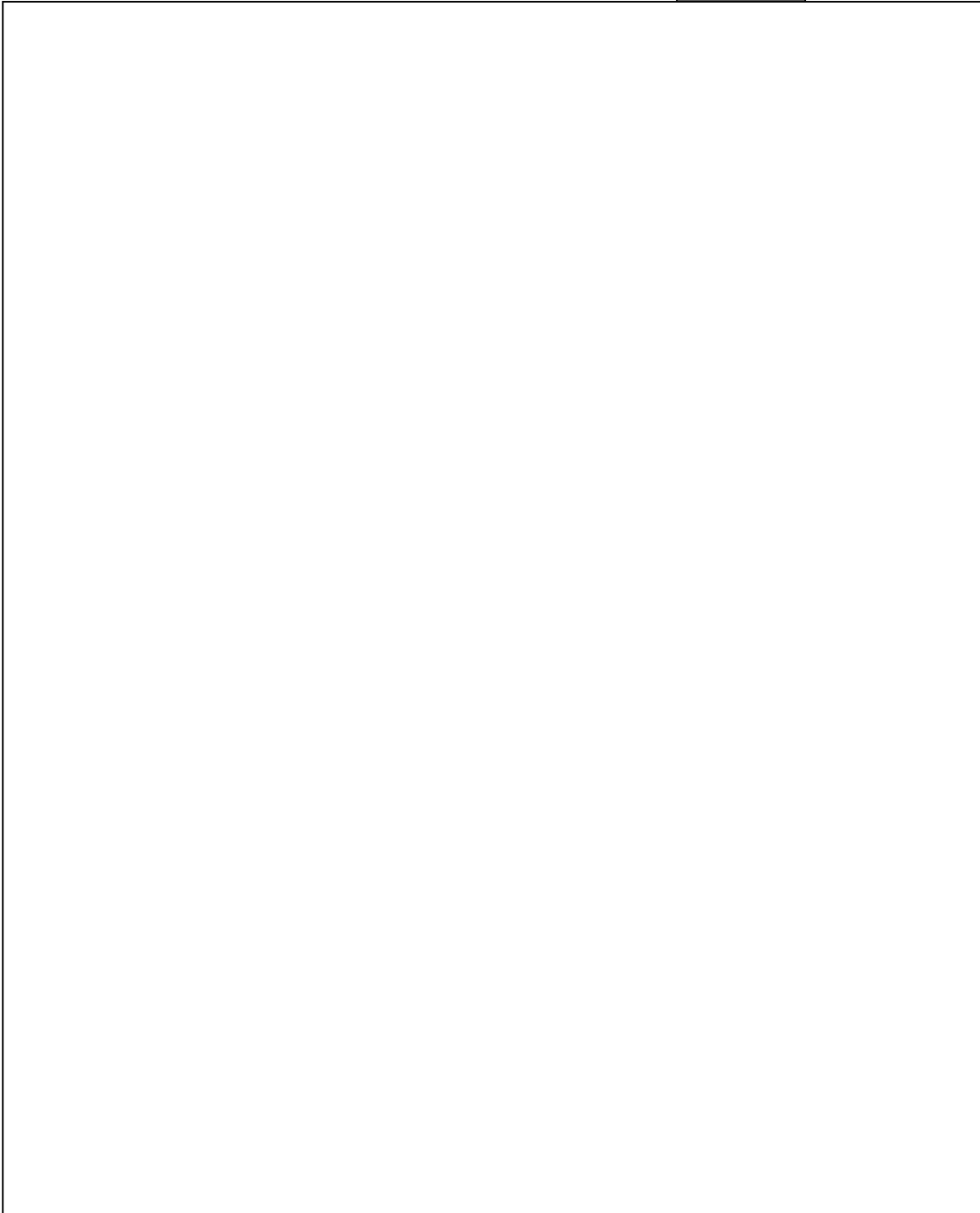
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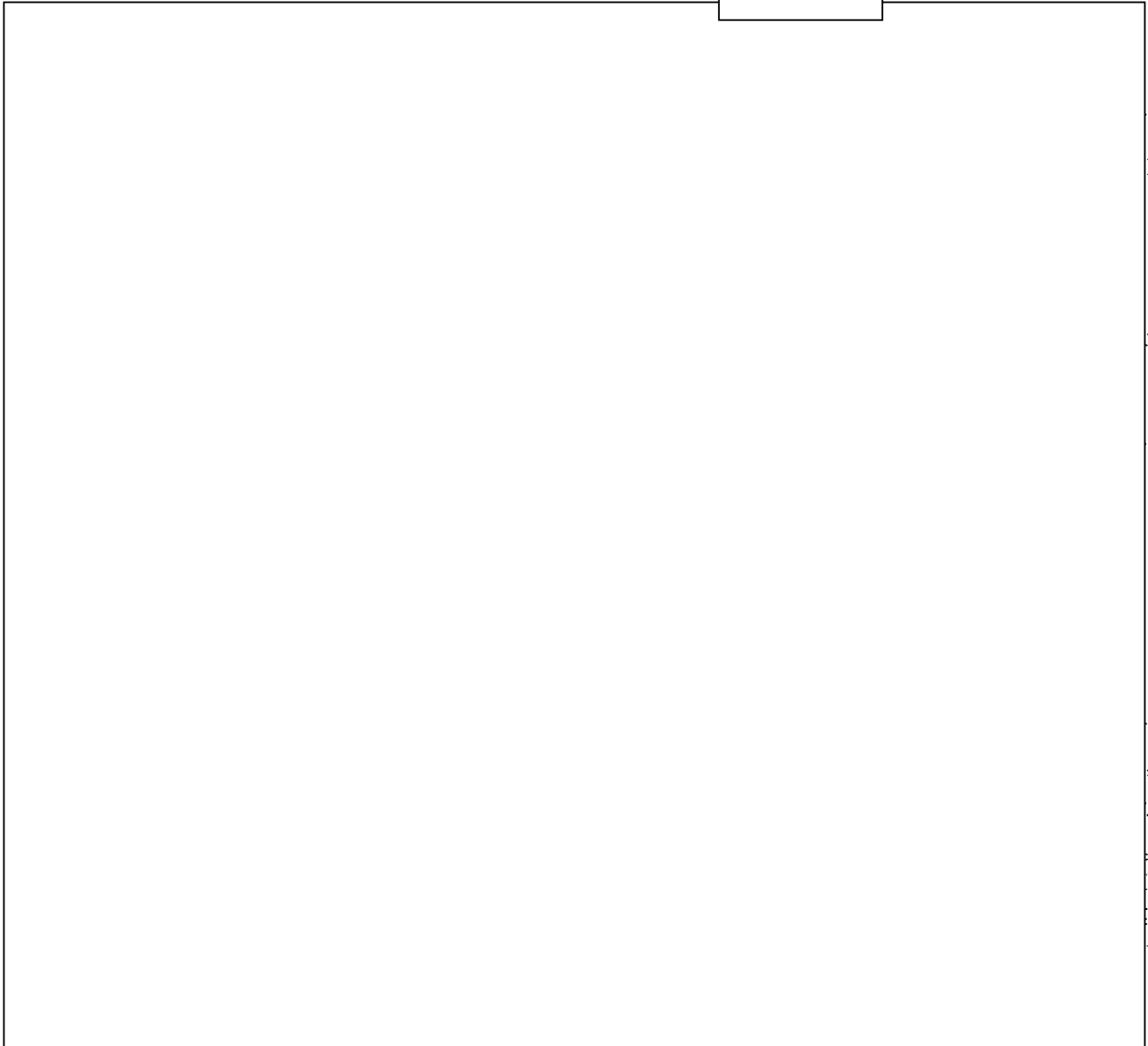
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